

Aesthetics of Wi-Spring mast/tower – How it looks.

I ran into Rich Biasin the other day in the town Hall and we talked briefly about the concern we all have to not do anything, either with broadband or anything else, that would be ugly or invasive of the special beauty of our valley from our most sweeping to most intimate vistas. I saw one of the towers in Alford last year, but that was up close, and I asked Crispin to take me over a couple of days ago to show me views from various distances. It seemed to me that the question was, what would the Wi-Spring set-up actually look like, say, if you saw one at a distance from the top of Cobble, or if you looked across from Santarella to Fernside, or if it was right next to you in the woods behind your neighbors' house.

There are only two places that are public property where you can see an Alford mast. One is at about a mile and it is just too far to see anything, and no one really knows about it. The other, better for studying the situation, is from the gorgeous center of town, across a sharp dip towards a large newish house built above a large field on the side of a hill. It was a drizzly day, and there was a lot of humidity in the air which Crispin said would make it harder for me to be able to see the structure. He helped me out – I didn't bring binoculars which made it very hard, but I did see it, I think.

Here is a picture of what I saw, maybe around 1500 feet away. I couldn't see it there and I can't find it on this picture, but that may be because of the haze. I believe it directly above the little white building to the left of the house, and between that and the ridge, near the pines. It is not visible along the long drive up the hill nor can it be seen from the house, according to Crispin.



Next, a couple of pictures from the property that I visited last year. I know I have mentioned that at that time I was standing about 60' from the structure and had to have it pointed out to me repeatedly. This time I took a more thoughtful and careful look, bearing in mind the kinds of discussions about the proposed 1500' foot distance from any building.

This mast is about 150' from the back of the owners' new house. It is close to the family's terrace and sitting area which is the center of their summer life, and the owners specifically stipulated that the structure *not* to be visible from this area or the kitchen window which looks over the terrace.

The first picture shows tower in the the trees as you step out of your car on the down-hill side of the house.



I couldn't find the mast when I took this picture, taken from about 250'. Crispin says on a brighter day it would be more visible. We went over to the terrace which put us about 150' from the tower. I stood right against the kitchen window so I could see what the owners from this much-used part of their house.

The mast is much more visible to the naked eye although I did have trouble finding it at first, and had to have the position repeatedly described by Crispin –“It's just below the leaning branch on the left –no, not that tree, the one with the green moss” etc etc – I am not good at hitting a baseball either..... Of course it is completely invisible with leaves on the trees in summer.



Finally, to give an idea of what is involved, a picture from the base of the tower looking back towards the house. Remember, this base is not visible from the house – note the little pine tree. The guy wires seem to be about 30' from each corner of the base.

I think it is strange how invisible comparatively the mast is from the house, but how close the house seems if you stand at the base. I think it is really important for the planning board to have seen these places in order to be familiar with at least this segment of the tower world.



Here is my thought: The salient issue may not be the distance but rather the actually level of eye-sore: the presence of trees or some other factor that blocks the tower view from the spaces the owners or neighbors enjoy, the visibility from various points.

These two towers, with different requirements, might hypothetically have had to be placed in an open field or space visible to neighbors or to the owners, if the requirement had been a certain distance. It might be better to protect the various views from public space and private living space by making the aesthetics the first order of business. In other words, if a closer placement “hides” something, isn’t it maybe better than “forcing” a structure out into the open or close to a road, for example, because of a distance-based guideline? Could this include a requirement of submission to the planning board of any change after installation that would make a structure more visible and thereby hurt the interests of the village and neighbors?

Another point included in the crucial aesthetic question: If the homeowner’s and Wi-Spring’s homeowner’s liability insurance coverage protects those two parties in the event that the someone stumbles in the woods at night and cuts his nose on a guy-wire, then why should the owner need to add to the something visually unpleasant like a 40’ or 50’ square fence that is not useful for any other reason? I would think the first step might be to make sure the town does not have any liability rather than assuming that it might and building in remedies that might not be the best.

Crispin can set up a site visit, which can include using Wi-Spring to access the internet from the Alford Town Hall parking lot, a good way to get a chance to experience with your laptop what the service is like, hitting two birds etc. The Broadband Committee urges the PB to go over to Alford with Crispin to see the whole set-up. I gather that both owners in Alford are very glad to have Crispin arrange to visit the sites. Broadband committee members who haven’t been over to Alford should go too.

I know in some towns farther to the East of us sales picked up significantly and most sales are now contingent on the home having wireless internet access. So there is no question that internet access is key for the tax base and ability to sell properties. Thanks a lot, Holly Ketron